CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Internal and external influences have generally a great deal to do with the growth and development of a literature. The internal influences arise from the character and pursuits of the people and events that have influenced from outside. In modern literature, there is consequently a large proportion of what is derivative and unoriginal. "There is no sincerer in literary borrowing," says W. D. Tucker. He continues: "Nature can be more or independent in the art of literature than in other arts to be independent, to be unoriginal by others' ideas, independent of others' ideas, while to imitate a literature is educate and to imitate is the mainstay of that art and of the other arts. It is a condition of progress in literature as in science that new inspiration must be continually sought, new conceptions assimilated. As one vein is used instead another must be opened. True art is of all the world and a nation does best in art when it corrects its own peculiar faults."
INTRODUCTION

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Internal and external influences have generally a
great deal to do with the growth and development of a
literature. The internal influences flow from the character
and pursuits of the people who speak the language and the
external from the historical contacts, the political or
religious movements, and the literary fashions that come
from outside. In every modern literature, there is conse-
quently a large proportion of what is derivative and un-
original. "There is no discredit in literary borrowing",
says T.G. Tucker. He continues: "Nations can no more be
independent in the art of literature than in other arts. To
be independent, to be unaffected by others' genius, inaccessible
to others' ideas, would be to render a literature as stagnant
and as grotesque as the paintings of China and of old Japan.
It is a condition of progress in literature as in science,
that new inspiration must be continually sought, new concep-
tions assimilated. As one vein is soon worked out, another
must be opened. True art is of all the world, and a nation
does best in art when it corrects its own peculiar faults
and expands its own particular ideas without meanwhile surrendering itself to a servile imitation of that for which its genius is naturally unfit.  

Every Literature, says De Quincey, unless it be crossed by some other different breed, tends to superannuation; and he points to the French as an example of one which suffered, in his opinion, to the point of extinction, because it rejected all alliance with exotic literature. With this example before him, he wrote in 1821 that English should always maintain contacts with that literature in Europe which is most youthful, evidently hinting at the literature of Germany. Great masters of English literature have at all times acted in the spirit of De Quincey's advice, and succeeded in enriching it. While no modern literature is more richly original than English, it is also true that none is more deeply indebted to foreign influences. Hugh Walker's remark in this context is relevant. He writes: "English literary history is the story of the Teutonic and Celtic tendencies 'corrected and clarified', and the Teutonic Celtic invention immensely assisted by influences and ideas flowing in from other resources. There

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1. T.G. Tucker, The Foreign Debt of English Literature, p.3.
have been large ingraftings from other stocks, either partially
kindred or altogether alien – from Greeks, Romans, Italians,
French, Germans as well as from Hebrews and other Orientals.2

Most readers know in a vague way that Chancer avows his
debt to France and Italy; that Shakespeare didn't invent his
own plots, but borrowed from the Italians, from the Greeks, the
Romans and others; that Milton was steeped in the Greek, Latin
and Italian Classics. Dryden owns himself an obedient follower
of the Greeks. Thomas Gray was a scholar of rare attainments
in both the language and literature of Greece. Shelley is
commonly regarded as one of the most daringly original of
English writers. Yet, Shelley’s mind was a veritable amalgam of
Homer, Euripides, Plato, Virgil, Dante and Goethe. Byron had
great enthusiasm for Greece. Coleridge and De Quincey were
deeply read in German literature and philosophy. Of Carlyle
it is said 'that if Carlyle revealed Germany to England,
Germany revealed Carlyle to himself'.3 All this means that the
English have incorporated the genius of generations of Greeks,
Romans, Italians and Germans in their literature. English
writers, however, have seldom been servile imitators. They

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3. ibid, p.31.
4. R.J. Ross, Outlines of Classical Literature, p.11.
can also claim with proper national pride that the influence of their literature, that of Shakespeare, Bacon, Byron and Shelley and others upon world literature has been wide-spread and profound.

In this context a historical review of recent Malayalam literature should be interesting. A just appreciation of Malayalam literature requires that it should not be confined to that literature alone. It certainly cannot claim an absolutely independent and isolated growth. Seeds of change have been sown by internal as well as external agencies. "To understand a river thoroughly, it is necessary to know its springs and tributaries, as well as its main course. Similarly to understand a literature properly, attention must be bestowed on the principal sources on which the writers drew for their inspiration and for their training, in arrangement and other important formal matters". Thus when we think of Malayalam literature and the sources and agencies which taught its authors to give form to their ideas and clothe them in becoming words, our mind goes to Sanskrit and Tamil literatures. But they are not the only sources. A great deal of what is most characteristic of modern Malayalam literature is definitely due to our contact with Western literatures. Pre-eminent by far, among them stands English literature, with its abundant and inexhaustible wealth of beauty and power. And its impact has ushered in a New Age

in the history of Malayalam literature. Historically speaking
the new developments in Malayalam poetry and Malayalam prose
can be well explained only with reference to the influence of
English on both, in the recent past. Indeed all sound study
of literature is comparative. No serious student of Malayalam
literature can fail to feel that a knowledge of what
English contributed to it is of inestimable value and that
ignorance in this matter is a source of weakness. It is not
proposed here to undertake an exhaustive study of the entire
effects produced by English on Kerala literature. The scope
of this study is more or less limited to the impact of
English on Malayalam poetry during the first six decades of
this century. While thus estimating the extent to which
English as a tributary stream has strengthened the current of
Malayalam poetry, special emphasis shall be laid on the
evolution of new poetic forms and poetic styles. Biographical
materials of an explorative nature shall also be examined in a
few chapters since they seem to shed considerable light on
certain individual achievements.

The Nineteenth century forms the epoch of India's
transition from the Medieval to the Modern Age. As has been
justly remarked by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "it was truly a
Renaissance, wider, deeper and more revolutionary than that of Europe after the fall of Constantinople. Commenting on what he calls the new "Renaissance" in India W.B. Yeats wrote in the Introduction to the first edition of Tagore's Gitanjali:

'For all I know, so abundant and so simple is this poetry, the new Renaissance has been in your country and I shall never know it except by hearsay'. According to many eminent Indians, it was the English education initiated by Macaulay that triggered off a new Renaissance in India. Macaulay as Education Member to the Governor General's Council in 1835 established the system of instruction in Arts and Sciences through the medium of English. Bengal was the first province to feel the impact of this system. A great Indian historian comments on it: "This Renaissance was the first fruit of English education in Bengal. English-educated teachers and their Europe-inspired thought helped to modernise Bihar and Orissa, Hindustan and Decan. New literary types, reforms of the language, social reconstruction, political aspirations, religious movements and even changes in manners that originated in Bengal, passed like ripples from a central ebb across the challenge of novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity for understanding social, not exaggerating their provincial barriers to the farthest corners of India". 5

This new wave caused by the magic touch of English gradually spread to the south and was felt in all spheres of life.


The high standard of rational thinking set up by this education led to radical reforms which regenerated the whole of India. It awakened a sense of Indian nationality and patriotic feelings such as this country never knew before. Finally it developed those political ideas and political organisations which by a natural process of evolution led to the freedom of our motherland. The rationalistic effect of English education manifested itself more in moral and social ideas. A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social conventions. Nehru remarks on this point. "The impact of Western culture on India was the impact of a dynamic society, of a 'modern' consciousness, on a static society wedded to medieval habits of thought, which, however sophisticated and advanced in its own way, could not progress because of its inherent limitations". Change came into India because of this impact of the West.

The impact of English culture gave us in the fulness of time three needed impulses. It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire for new creation; it confronted the Indian spirit with the challenge of novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity for understanding, assimilating, and conquering them.

If new ideas and literature were to take root and flourish, a new climate of thought and purpose had to be created. It might be the still familiar (Indian) soil, but modern tools and rich manure would be quite welcome. The shock of the Western contact had turned, while English literature had fertilised the field; and in course of time modern Indian literatures were born. In the opinion of Tagore, "originality in literature lies in its capacity to absorb the universal in all literatures and arts and give it a unique expression characteristic of its peculiar genius and traditions. Then again the human mind being one, parallel developments along similar lines can be traced in different literatures, not suggestive of mutual influence, but denoting independent pursuits of truths which are universal. This is specially true of the production of the great minds whose highest realisations often present a remarkable harmony of kinship, even though they may be widely separated by distance and time."7

Prof. V.K. Gokak thus sums up his views on the impact of English on modern Indian literatures. "It was in the English class room that the Indian literary Renaissance was born. The English language has linked India with the rest of the world. It has conducted sparks of inspiration from the world outside to India and from India to the world. We are blessed with the

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2. V.K. Gokak, English in India - Its present and Future, p. 76.
two-way traffic English has offered us. . . . . . . . . . . . . . English is
certainly not richer than our tribe. But it is a pearl all the
same, and it would be foolish to throw it away. 8 When English
education made its headway all over India, Universities were
established at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. With them arose a
new generation that enjoyed Shakespeare and Milton and acquired
a critical acquaintance with the works of Bacon and Johnson.
"Indian writing in English (not in English alone but all Indian
writing) is greatly influenced by writing in England, and we
have had our own 'Romantics', 'Victorians', 'Georgians',
and 'modernists'. 9

In Kerala the Christian Missions did considerable pioneering
work in the field of English education. They set up schools in
different parts of the State. Emulating this example the Rajah's
Free High School was started in Trivandrum in 1854. In 1866,
this school became a College known as the Maharajah's College
which was the nucleus of the present Kerala University. As an
offshoot of the new education, magazines and journals on the
English model also appeared in Indian languages, including
Malayalam. In Malayalam the most popular magazines were Manorama,
Vidyavilasini, Bhashaposhini and Kavana Kaumudi. Their columns
were devoted to articles on social, political and literary
subjects. The writers in these magazines used a new language

and poetry in their hands became a medium for the expression of a modern sensibility. These magazines and journals added an impetus to the process of renovation already started by English education. "It was the advent of liberal education during the British days that changed the entire perspective of Malayalam literature," writes Prof. Joseph Mundassery. He continues: "During the last hundred years Kerala witnessed a renaissance more or less parallel to the one Bengal had. It was the growth of general education that provided the intelligentsia with a new vista of human knowledge. As a result of this we had movements for social emancipation led by great reformers like Sri Narayana guru and Mahakavi Kumaran Asan". 

Dr. K.M. George, a distinguished writer in Malayalam and an authority on Dravidian linguistics, feels that:

'unlike in certain other branches such as fiction and drama, in poetry the influence has been predominantly English......Malayalam poetry has been originally in the grip of rhetoric and feats of craftsmanship. From a poetry of meaning it became one of experience, from wonderful speculations it changed over to considerations of realities of life; its 'alankaras' (imagery) became a means and not an end, it ceased to be the hobby of the leisured class and became the mouth-piece of the ordinary man; from ornate diction it turned into the simple and mellifluous; it changed over from a mere expression of sentiment to an effective expression of complex human psychology. It has gained in elegance, dignity and refinement and much of its progress is due to its continuous and inspiring contact with the best in English poetry."  

10. Joseph Mundassery, Changing Values in Kerala Literature - an article in Indian Express, dated 7th December, '73. 
11. Dr. K.M. George, Western Influence on Malayalam Language and Literature, p.144.
According to Sri Sukumar Azhikode, a great literary critic, "It is a complex of political, social and literary influences that gave shape to the awakening in Malayalam literature. The major political force was the freedom struggle that was gathering speed throughout the country which spilled the language of a new life to the people. In its wake as well as prior to it were stirring the forces of deep social unrest caused by the teachings of social and religious reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and with particular reference to Kerala, Sri Narayana Guru, who tried to give a new outlook to Hinduism, cutting away its trappings like caste divisions and untouchability. Apparently novel canons of poetics and criticism trickled to the writers through British-sponsored education, who were dissatisfied with the lack of content as well as formal clumsiness of the old type of poetry they were treated to for long. All these forces emboldened them to articulate in a fresh fashion consistent with the new outlook and aspirations dawning over India as a whole.  

To quote Sri N.V. Krishna Warrier, a poet and a great scholar:

"The impact of English first manifested itself in the novels of Chantu Menon. In poetry Assan and Vallathol reflect this in a particular way. They were rooted in Indian tradition, but could imbibe the spirit of English Romantic literature. I should include poets like G. Sankara Kurup and Balamani Amma in this category. Changampuzha Krishnas Pillai and others lacked this basic Indian tradition; but were inspired

12. Sukumar Azhikode, from his reply for a Questionnaire.
by the English spirit (the Romantic spirit). The introduction of the Romantic spirit into Malayalam is definitely due to our acquaintance, directly or through translations (as in the case of Vallathol Harayana Menon) with Western literature represented by English literature, and almost all writers of the Twentieth Century from Asan downwards (barring a few poets like Vadakkumkur) have come under this influence. The views of some of the great living poets of the Age on the impact of English on Malayalam poetry will have not only the weight of authority but also of propriety. They responded in the following manner to a set of questions that were addressed to them. The questions were:-

1) As a poet, have you been influenced by English poets and their poetry?

2) Have you been influenced by English Critical thought, either through literary movements or through the works of individual critics like S.T. Coleridge, Arnold, T.S. Eliot etc.?

3) Who is your favourite English poet?

4) What, in your opinion, is the nature and extent of English influence on Malayalam Poetry?

Answers:

G. Sankara Kurup.

1) "I never had the advantage of a systematic study of English. My acquisitions from English literature are mainly the result of self-study. I always made a sincere

2) "I am interested in English literary critics and knowledge of the various branches of aesthetic taste."

13. N.V. Krishna Warrier, from his reply for a Questionnaire.
An introduction to the study of English literature, an effort to assimilate the best in it. F.T. Palgrave's
'The Golden Treasury' is one of the earliest anthologies, I went through. Shakespeare and Goldsmith are two great English
Masters who won my profound admiration. Here I must gratefully
remember the services of my colleagues (co-teachers) Mr. Sivar-
rama Menon and Mr. Achyutha Menon who initiated me to the
great Shakespearean tragedies like Macbeth and Othello. I
occasionally sipped with delight the poems of Wordsworth,
Shelley and Keats. Fitzgerald's 'Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam'
is a verse translation that inspired me greatly in my creative
life. Though I didn't like the hedonistic philosophy in it,
its oriental setting, wealth of imagery, symbolism, imaginative
import and above all the artistic expression of the deep-seated
melancholy seen in the meditations over life had a powerful
impact on me. My translation of it proves this well. However,
it was also for me partly an experiment to test my comprehension
of English. Knowledge of English served me like a magic key
that opened the door to the treasure-house of Tagore's poetry.
It also introduced me to the Persian literature, particularly
to the poems of Hafiz. Though I liked the poets mentioned here,
I cannot say that they have influenced me very much in my
poetic endeavours. Nor can I say with certainty that I was not
influenced by the 'Leaves of Grass' and 'Democratic Vistas'
of Walt Whitman in the composition of some of my prose-poems'.

2) "I am interested in English literary criticism. Knowledge of it has considerably enhanced my aesthetic sense."
An Introduction to the study of English literature: by W. H. Hudson was one of my first guides in this field. Coleridge's critical flights had a special appeal for me, particularly his theory of Imagination. I also turn now and then to the critical essays of T.S. Eliot. I read C. E. M. Joad's philosophical essays with interest and from him I learned about the great philosopher Spinoza. Tolstoy is another creative thinker whose view of life I admire. In English literature, my knowledge about the English authors and their works is limited.

3) "Wordsworth is certainly the best English poet I like. This doesn't mean that I go only sparingly to Shelley and Keats. I like Wordsworth most, because of his affinity to Eastern thought and philosophy very well reflected in his poems. His pantheistic philosophy is a case in point."

4) "English literature certainly exerted considerable influence on many Malayalam poets. It has also been, and is to many of them an open sesame to the riches of European literatures like French, German and Russian. Modern Malayalam poets are deeply indebted to English literature for their new mode of expression with its emphasis on emotion and imagination."

N. Balakumari Amma

1) "As a teen-ager I used to read the poems of (Mrs.) Felicia Hemans. Their emotional tone and tragic themes

10. Alfred Charles Swinburne (1837-1895), known as the volumes of lyrics, remarkable for beauty of words and simplicity.
impressed me. Perhaps they had influenced my earlier poems, especially the earliest, an elegy on a playmate's death. Mahakavi Vallathol had pointed out the influence of English poetry in it. I do not think my later poems retained the influence.

2) "I rarely read literary criticism in English. I had no college education with its regular course, an introduction to English literature. My knowledge about the English authors and their works is gained from reading at random."

3) "This is difficult to answer. I have enjoyed reading poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley and above all A.E. and Yeats. I like poetry to be imaginative as well as philosophical. The best poetry is the essence of one's life distilled by intellect and sweetened by imagination."

4) "English influence on Malayalam poetry has thriven ever since the spread of English education in India. It is a welcome influence. It helped our poetry to grow fast and gain new forces. Our modern poets also, with their emphasis on variety and freshness, show this influence to a great extent."

V. K. Pillai: Speeches, Menon.

1) "As a student and poet, I have been influenced by English poetry. Shakespeare has been the biggest influence. Wordsworth or Shelley failed to impress me much, but Keats has been close to my heart. I admire Hardy's poems for their strong grip, unafraid of the dark and Burns's for their wildflower beauty. English, of course, has had a decided influence through original poems and through English translations of poems. Indeed, our gang in the direction of strong, simple, beautiful, almost accent speech (as in evidence in the book of H. D. and compared as not having puissance). The latter had been our tradition. The influence of English, American, and Continental poetry is more pronounced in our 'post modern' Veilvellen poets'. But I am not sure if there has been process of genuine assimilating of any." Shakespeare, I sit by very often, even now, for pure intellectual pleasure." 

2) "I have been influenced by the critical thought of Arnold and to a much lesser extent of Eliot. Arnold's eagerness to study a poem in its proper social and historical milieu, his emphasis on simple, suggestive beauty, devoid of trappings or bathos, etc.,

The poets quoted represent the older generation of living poets. The Nationalist revolution in Indian literature has had a powerful impact on Malayalam poetry. Their resurrection and his 'criticism of life' theory, impressed me. Eliot led me to the roots and fountains of speech and expression and
taught me to be more aware of the possibilities and profundity of my own language in this direction. Lamb touched me deeper perhaps by his discerning taste although he was too shy to 
make a big noise".

3) "Shakespeare without doubt, because he embraces all other poets, the best as well as the 'baddest' in.

4) "English of course, has had a decided influence through original poems and through English translations of poems of other climes (e.g., The Rubaiyat). In addition to widening our horizons, English poetry has helped us largely to shed our flair for metrical effects, conceits and other artificialities, and turned our gaze in the direction of strong, simple, beautiful, almost succinct speech (as is evidenced in Sir Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia' compared to Aswaghosha's Buddhacharita. The latter had been our tradition). The influence of English, American and Continental poetry is more pronounced in our 'most modern Malayalam poetry'; but I am not sure if there has been a process of genuine assimilation as of old".

The poets quoted represent the older generation of living poets. They all feel like one that English literature has had a powerful impact on Malayalam poetry. Their admissions
reveal that in individual cases there have been variations in
the extent of impact. It is but natural because of the
difference, in their educational backgrounds. They belong to
two entirely distinct systems of learning, the one representing
the traditional and the other the modern liberal type. The
poets of the first system of education cultivated an acquaintance
with the spirit of the New Age, by their own efforts while the
latter imbibed it effortlessly from the very atmosphere in
which they lived and learned. G. Sankara Kurup and Balamani
Amma belong to the former category while Vyloppillil Sreedhara
Menon and the late Changampuzha Krishnan Pillai are fully the
products of the new environment. The poets of both schools
seem to have a common preference for English Romantic poets
and critics. And it is a sure indication of the fact that they were
had a greatly fascinated for the Romantic spirit.